



"ESCORT THIS AMERICAN WOMAN TO SAFETY!" ROARED HAL, ABOVE THE SHRIEK OF SHELL AND DIN OF BATTLE.

Starry Flag Weekly

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Hal on the Skirmish Line

OR

Fighting For the Queen of the Red Cross.

By DOUGLAS WELLS.

First Part.

CHAPTER I.

A SPY IN CAMP.

It was hot-intolerably hot.

Outside the sun beat mercilessly down, not a cloud in the sky suggesting the near approach of the rainy season.

Within the tent the shade was as intolerable as the unprotected heat outside because no breath of air stirred, and the little room enclosed in canvas became as stifling as a dungeon.

Such was Cuba in the month of June, 1898, and such particularly was the Province of Santiago, where the American army of invasion rested for the moment in its onward march.

• Lieutenant Hal Maynard, for once without active duty, was trying to write a letter to a friend in the States.

He had begun it in the supposed shelter of his tent, and when he found that worse than the open air, he had sought to get some protection from the rays of the sun by squatting in the shadow of the tent. Unhappily there wasn't any shadow.

The sun was in the zenith, and not a shadow fell within a rod of his quarters.

The perspiration streamed down his bronzed face and it seemed as if his blood were boiling.

He looked about the camp. Here and there soldiers were in view, trying like himself to find shelter from the sun.

Most of them apparently were content to lie upon the ground inside their tents, for few were visible.

Along the rude road that connected with the towns lying in the direction of Santiago were ragged pacificos wending their way painfully into the camp where they hoped to get supplies of food.

The sight of such miserable human beings had become too familiar to Hal to arouse more than a passing flash of indignation.

He saw what they were and speedily dismissed them from his mind.

As he stood there, stretching his arms and feeling almost drowsy from the extreme heat, he noticed that a tall palm

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growing near gave about a square yard of shade near its trunk.

He promptly appropriated that comparatively sheltered spot and with his writing pad on his knees was soon at work again.

Seated thus, his back was toward his tent.

He had been busy, he knew not how long, when his attention was attracted by a light thud behind him and almost immediately afterward a pebble rolled over the ground and struck his thigh.

Naturally Hal looked around to see who had thrown the missile.

He was just in time to catch sight of a ragged Cuban emerging stealthily from his tent.

"Hello there," called Hal starting up, "what are you about any way?"

"Pardon senor," the Cuban replied with a whine, "I was driven by hunger to look for food in the tent."

"That's no place for you," said Hal sharply, "go to the quartermaster."

"A thousand pardons, senor, but you know we Cubans are so distressed that we lose sight of our ordinary sense of honor. I never stole in my life——"

"Well, then," interrupted Hal, "be off before you yield to temptation. There isn't any food there and I can't help you to any. Apply to the proper place and you may get relief."

The Cuban slunk away and Hal resumed his writing.

His pencil had hardly touched the paper when he heard a sound of scuffling just beyond his tent mingled with voices in angry altercation.

Spanish was the language.

"Drop it I tell you."

"Out of my way, dog."

"You shall not play the traitor-"

"Hound, I will kill you!"

Hal had leaped to his feet at the first

words and was running in the direction whence they came.

Just beyond his tent he saw two Cubans engaged in a fierce struggle. One of them was the man whom he had just sent away.

The other was a stranger.

It was no ordinary fight they were engaged in, for one seemed to be trying to wrest something from the clutch of the other.

Seeing the officer coming, the first Cuban immediately let go and exclaimed:

"It is nothing but a struggle for bread, senor."

"He lies, senor officer," cried the other. "The man is no pacifico or reconcentrado. He is a spy and I know it."

The first Cuban had started away on the run the moment he spoke.

Hal was after him.

The second Cuban cried out to him as he passed:

"See what he took from your tent."

He held up a long brown envelope which might have been used to carry dispatches in. As a matter of fact, there was nothing in it of any consequence, but a spy might have mistaken its purpose.

Hal did not stop to look at it or take it, but dashed on after the spy who was making as fast as he could to the country beyond the lines.

"Lieutenant Maynard."

This call came from an orderly who had come up to Hal's quarters just as he started after the spy.

Apparently Hal did not hear him and the orderly raising his voice to its utmost, again shouted:

"Lieutenant Maynard."

Hal heard the voice evidently, for with a bare glance over his shoulder as he ran he shouted back something which could not be distinctly understood, but which sounded something like "too busy. Can't stop now."

The orderly looked first astonished and then pleased.

There was an evil gleam in his eyes as he turned with a smile to retrace his steps.

He was one of those men of undoubted personal courage, but mean spirit, who cannot bear to see anybody rising in the estimation of his superiors.

Long attached to General Shafter's staff, this orderly had had occasion at many times to convey messages from the general to the lieutenant.

It had galled him unspeakably to see this young officer, who had never served in the regular army until the war broke out, singled out for important missions and complimentary allusions.

He had no earthly reason to be jealous of Lieutenant Maynard, and yet it was jealousy that now inspired him and caused that evil gleam in his eyes.

He went straight to General Shafter's tent and having been admitted saluted and stood at attention.

"Well," said the general sharply, "where is Lieutenant Maynard?"

"I do not know, sir," replied the orderly. "The last I saw of him he was running away."

"Running away," repeated the general in amazement. "What do you mean?"

"He ran from his tent at full speed, sir, just as I approached it. He was going toward the lines."

"Didn't you speak to him?" demanded the general.

"I did, sir."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing, sir."

"What did you say?"

"I called to him again, sir."

"Did he hear you?" and and and

"Undoubtedly, sir, because he made some kind of answer."

"What was it?"

"I couldn't make out exactly, sir, but it seemed evident that he chose to ignore your commands."

General Shafter, who had been listening in unabated astonishment, now looked sharply at the orderly.

"Keep your inferences to yourself," he said gruffly. "Lieutenant Maynard is not a man to ignore his general's commands."

The orderly paled, for he saw that he had made a mistake.

Lieutenant Maynard stood too high in the estimation of his superiors to be discredited in any such fashion.

"Tell Mr. Jameson to report here," said the general.

The orderly saluted and withdrew, and a moment later Lieutenant Jameson stood before the general.

"Go to Lieutenant Maynard's quarters," said General Shafter, "and wait for him. When he comes, tell him to report here."

Lieutenant Jameson set out to obey this command but he had not taken a dozen paces before he met Hal hurrying along dragging a ragged Cuban by his collar.

"General Shafter sends for you, Mr. Maynard," said Jameson.

Hal grunted an acknowledgement of the message and proceeded with his captive into the general's tent.

There he threw the Cuban down, and while the fellow crouched in terror at his feet, Hal saluted and panted:

"Sir, I have to report my own disobe-

The general repressed a smile and looked his inquiry.

"I was on the run after this fellow,"
Hal continued, "when I heard your or-

A BUTTON OR BADGE FREE-SEE LAST PAGE.

derly calling to me. I was altogether too busy then, sir, to obey, for which I beg leave to present my apology."

With this Hal pointed to the cowering Cuban.

"A soldier's first duty," said the general slowly, "is obedience."

"I am aware of that," Hal responded, "and I do not think I have usually shown that I am unmindful of that duty. But in this instance I have two excuses."

"What are they?"

"First, that the order had not been given; second, that this man is a spy."

CHAPTER II.

A VOLUNTEER GUIDE.

· Ever since the American army had landed in the Province of Santiago, it had been beset with spies sent out by the Spanish in the guise of reconcentrados.

By their pitiful appearance and loud protestations of joy at the coming of the American troops, these fellows had gained ready access to our lines.

It was only with the greatest difficulty that important information was kept from going to the enemy, and if the whole story of the war could be told it would undoubtedly prove that many a spy managed to escape detection and return to his own lines with a budget of news.

This matter had been a source of no little irritation to General Shafter, and when Hal reported that this fellow was a spy, he was immediately interested.

"If what you say is true," he exclaimed, "you have done another service to your country. What is your proof?"

"Partly the word of a pacifico," replied Hal. "May I ask him to come in?" "Certainly."

Hal withdrew, and presently reentered, bringing with him the Cuban who had been found struggling with the spy.

Asked to account for himself, the Cuban replied:

"I am a reconcentrado, Senor General, and until early this morning was at the border of Jaragua. Then I escaped, for I felt that I would rather starve within the American lines—if I could get no food here—than stay to certain starvation among the Spanish. My name is Antonio Vara and I used to cultivate a farm a few miles from here. When I came into camp this morning I saw that man prowling about."

He pointed to the spy.

"I recognized him," continued Vara, "as a Spanish soldier, for I have seen him many times among the troops at Jaragua. I knew at once that he must be here on a spying expedition, and I wondered how I could denounce him to the American soldiers."

"You could have spoken to the first officer you met," suggested General Shafter.

"I suppose so," said Vara, "but I was afraid. I hardly knew what to do, Senor General, but I kept the man under my eye, and at length saw him approach a tent near which this officer was writing."

Here Vara indicated Hal.

"I saw him sneak within the officer's tent," resumed Vara, "and I sought to attract the officer's attention by tossing a pebble toward him. The ruse succeeded partially, but it seems that the officer believed this man when he claimed to be a pacifico. He had stolen something from the officer's tent, and I determined to prevent him from taking it out of the camp. So I attacked him and we had a struggle which was interrupted by the officer. This is what he had stolen."

So saying, Vara handed to General Shafter the long brown envelope.

"ALLEE SAME, BULLEE NICK CARTER!"

"There is nothing in it of any consequence, General," said Hal, "though undoubtedly the spy thought it might be a dispatch, or possibly an important map."

General Shafter handed the envelope to Hal without looking at it.

"This has been a good thing," he said.
"Vara, you have earned a square meal
as well as the gratitude of the American
army. I will see that you get the square
meal if nothing more."

Thereupon the general summoned an orderly, and instructed him to bring a guard and another officer.

To the officer he said:

"This man, Antonio Vara, has performed a service for our arms that entitles him to unusual consideration. See that he is well cared for."

Turning to the officer of the guard, the general continued:

"This man is a spy. Put him in the guardhouse to await orders."

With a grateful look toward Hal, Vara withdrew and the guard took away the spy. Then General Shafter said:

"I sent for you to give you a new mission."

"I am ready, general."

"I presumed you would be," said the general, dryly, "but there isn't going to be any fun in it. However, as you are not out here for fun, I take it that we needn't discuss the dangers of the mission, but get right down to business. must have some scouting done, and I don't think that it should be carried out by a detachment. You will go alone, or with one man, if in your own opinion you can do better for having a companion. The Spaniards are constantly changing the disposition of their troops and utilizing every moment to strengthen their entrenchments. I must know twenty-four hours from now just what their positions

are between here and including Jaragua. I am sure that you will find it as practicable to go alone as to be accompanied by a company. What do you think?"

"Your opinion is better than mine," Hal responded.

"Not necessarily, for I have a good deal of confidence in your judgment."

Hal's bronzed face took on a deeper flush, but he said nothing, and the general continued:

"There is really nothing more, Mr. Maynard. You know perfectly well what is wanted of you, and the sooner you make a start the better."

"I go at once, general," Hal responded. He saluted and then paused at the doorway.

"Do I understand," he asked, "that I can take one man with me?"

"You may," the general replied.

"Lieutenant Smithson, sir."

"I thought so," said Shafter, smiling.

Lieutenant Smithson and Lieutenant Hal Maynard were the closest of friends. They had been comrades in more than one fierce conflict with the Spaniards, and their loyalty to each other was the subject for considerable comment in the American army.

Hal lost no time in looking up his comrade.

"I want you to take a walk, Smithson," he said.

"Outside the lines, old chap?"

"Exactly. You probably understand what it means."

"I think I do," said Smithson. "How long will you be gone?"

"I must be back in twenty-four hours. Let's get a move on at once, for every minute counts."

Without more ado the young men started up the road that lead from the

READ THE GREAT PREMIUM OFFER ON LAST PAGE.

camp in the direction of Jaragua. They had not gone far before they heard firing in advance.

"Ah," said Hal. "There's a skir-mish."

"Probably," responded Smithson, "it is a scrap between some band of Cubans who are on their way to join Garcia's forces, and an outpost of the enemy."

Whatever was the nature of the firing it ceased presently, and the two scouts continued on their way.

Hal had a map of the district which had been given to him by his commander on the occasion of his first scouting expedition in the vicinity.

The road they were travelling was a miserable affair, and Hal's mind was heavy with anxiety as he saw the difficulties that would beset the Americans in the matter of transporting heavy artillery.

The road soon became so bad that he actually thought he had made a mistake and he consulted his map.

No, there could be no mistake. This was plainly the route marked upon the map between the camp and Jaragua, and yet it was hardly more than a crude trail, not to be dignified by the term cart track.

It wound with many a sharp twist and turn among the trees and was in many places so narrow that an ordinary wagon could not have made its way along without great difficulty.

Presently the scouts heard a loud explosion some distance ahead.

"That doesn't sound like cannon," said Hal.

"Perhaps," suggested Smithson, "some vessel in the fleet has dropped a shell into a Spanish magazine.

"Our longest range gun," said Hal, "couldn't fire as far as this."

Then he stopped suddenly, grasping his companion's arm as he did so, and turning his head to one side.

"You hear something," whispered Smithson. "So did I."

A warning "sh' was Hal's only reply. What they heard was a rustling of foliage and a crackling as of somebody walking over dead twigs.

The undergrowth was too thick just there for them to see into the forest on either hand.

It occurred to both of them that they might be in danger of an ambuscade from a party of retreating Spaniards. The resistance offered to the landing had been so slight as to lead them both to fear that the Spaniards had really massed a large body of troops in the vicinity ready to fall upon the Americans at a favorable opportunity.

Hal already had his sword in his hand, and Smithson drew a revolver.

Together they faced the point from which the noises came.

It was quite evident that whoever or whatever was concealed in the undergrowth was making no special attempt to mask his approach. Consequently neither of the young soldiers dreaded the outcome.

A moment passed, and then the figure of a man was discerned making his way rapidly through the forest to the road. Hardly had he been discovered before he was in full view.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Hal, lowering his sword, and advancing. "How is this, Vara?"

"Ah, what good fortune to overtake you so soon," cried the Cuban, as he stepped from the brush into the open roadway.

There were a few scratches upon his hands, but on the whole he appeared to have affected his journey through the brush with the least possible damage to himself.

"I thought you were going to get a square meal," said Hal.

"I have had it," replied Vara, "and have been eating it on the way."

"How did you get out of camp?"

"I slipped out without being observed," replied Vara, with a smile. "I have lived around here too long not to know many a way that does not appear to the eyes of strangers. I want to do something for Cuba, senor, and so I beg you to let me go with you."

"I am afraid you put a good deal of responsibility upon me, my friend," replied Hal, gravely. "You should have remained in camp. I am afraid the general might not take it kindly of me if I should refrain from handing you over to the officer of the guard."

"Ah, do not do that, I beg of you," cried Vara. "Let me show you how I can win my way to the general's favor. I caught sight of you just stepping into the forest at the outskirts of the camp. I knew you must be on the way to Jaragua, and so I followed by what you Americans call a 'short cut.'"

"And you are skilled in travelling through the brush, too," said Hal. "It is all right, Vara. I did not choose you to go with me, but having found you I shall not send you back. You shall be our guide."

CHAPTER III.

DESPERATE SPANIARDS.

"Where, then, do you want to go?" asked Vara, delighted at Hal's decision.

"First to Jaragua, after that, we will see."

"Do you wish to make a shorter cut?"
"No, the road will do until we come
to the nearest village."

"That is El Mesa, and it is but a short distance from here."

Hal warned his companions to proceed with caution, lest their coming be perceived by the Spanish garrison that might still be occupying the place.

They had gone but a little way when they were met by a party of Cuban soldiers hurrying toward the beach.

Rifles were leveled on the instant, but the Cubans, recognizing Hal's uniform, promptly lowered them.

"What is the situation beyond?" inquired Hal of the commander.

"The Spaniards are retreating," was the reply, "we fought them at El Mesa. They are now leaving that town and destroying it as they go."

"Then that accounts for the explosion we heard a few moments ago?"

"Yes, senor. They have set fire to one of their block houses, and the explosion occurred when the fire reached the magazine."

"It was a pity," said Hal, "to permit them to destroy any property that might be valuable to us."

"We did all we could," responded the Cuban, "and our orders now are to join the force at the shore."

The squad of Cuban soldiers passed on. "Other detachments of the Cubans," said Vara, "are making to the beach through the brush."

"Then," said Hal, "I suppose we can take it for granted that there will be no more fighting up in this direction until the invading army gets to work."

"There is no certainty about that. General Garcia has many thousand men scattered throughout the country hereabout, and while they are pushing on to join the Americans, they may encounter detachments of Spaniards, in which case there is sure to be a fight."

A moment later the young men emerged from the forest, and saw before them the houses of El Mesa. Several of them were in flames. In the centre of the town were the smoking ruins of a block house.

It was there, undoubtedly, that the explosion had taken place which the scouting party had thought might be the opening up of an attack by Spanish heavy artillery.

At the edges of the town some of the inhabitants could be seen looking rue-fully on as their dwellings disappeared. Elsewhere, a few were trying to put out the flames.

This was evidence that the Spanish garrison had really left the place.

"Which way do you think they have gone?" said Hal, turning to Vara.

"Undoubtedly to the west," was the reply, "where the first town they will reach is Demajayabo. After that they would come to Jaragua."

"Are both of those places fortified by garrisons, do you suppose?" asked Hal.

"Probably, because the Spaniards have fortified every possible approach to Santiago."

"Well," said Hal, "it is our business to find out how strong their fortifications are, and how heavily they are manned."

They went on directly to the town, and then Hal paused a moment to make up his mind just which course to take next.

There were no Spanish soldiers in sight, but over the tops of the trees to the westward he saw the roof of what appeared to be a block house.

It was apparently about half a mile away at the top of a low hill, and he judged that it constituted one of the line of defences which the enemy had established all along that part of the coast.

"We'll go there," he said, pointing to it.

"The regular road," responded Vara, "leads directly past it."

"Then we won't go by the regular

road, if you can take us to it through the

"That I certainly can," replied Vara.

He led them at once from the road into the forest. If it had not been for the previous experience that Hal had had when he was fighting with the Cuban insurgents in the interior, he would have found the greatest difficulty in making his way along the line taken by his guide.

There was not only a constant tangle of creeping undergrowth, every vine of which seemed to be armed with spears, but there was a thick growth of a prickly cactus to be encountered and avoided at nearly every step.

Through all this Vara made his way as readily as though he was on a public road, and Hal and Smithson followed so skilfully that they sustained only the slightest annoyance in the way of scratches.

It took but a few minutes to come to a point whence they could see the block house dimly through the foliage.

Then they halted, for Hal's attention was atracted by the sound of voices.

One was loud and stern. Spanish was the language used.

"Stand to your work, dog," it said. "Would you have the Yankee pigs capture ammunition which they would use against Spain?"

The reply could not be heard distinctly, but it was uttered in a protesting voice.

"Take that, then."

This remark, uttered in a fiendish shout, was followed instantly by the report of a revolver.

Then there was a faint cry, almost like a groan of pain from the same direction.

Hal and his companions looked at each other.

They guessed what had happened, and though death is the most commonplace

HOW DO YOU LIKE "THE HUMAN FLY?"

affair in war, death under such circumstances sent a chill to their blood.

"It's nothing short of murder," hissed Smithson. "Much as I hate the Spanish soldiers, I cannot help a feeling of sorrow for a man who is shot down by his officer.

Hal nodded, and immediately began to move through the brush toward the block house, signalling to his comrade to follow him in silence.

Vara crept up beside him and whispered:

"Have you a spare revolver?"

For reply, Hal drew his revolver and handed it to the Cuban.

"Now," whispered Vara, "if it is necessary I can fight to some purpose."

Hal's sword was in his hand, and Smithson was walking with drawn revolver.

But two rods away now was the block house within which there might be a whole company of Spanish soldiers.

Over them, however many there might be, it was certain there was an officer who had been stirred to despeartion, and from whom, therefore, nothing could be expected except the most pitiless attack.

What were the soldiers doing within that block house?

The question was soon to be answered.

Moving cautiously, but rapidly, Hal
advanced toward the entrance. It was
around the corner from the direction in
which he had approached.

Just as he rounded the corner he halted an instant, appalled, in spite of his experience, at the sight that met his eyes.

Just across the doorway, face down, was the body of a Spanish soldier, bleeding from fresh wounds.

It was he who had been killed by the officer's shot.

Possibly the man had attempted to disobey orders and escape. If so, the fate he met would undoubtedly act as an inspiration to such soldiers as were left within to do the duty which had been set for them.

It was less than a second that Hal paused.

Stepping to the open door, he looked within.

Ranged along the further side of the room, which took up the entire floor of the house, were six Spanish privates.

Each stood by a loophole through which he was pointing a Mauser rifle. The loop-holes were upon the side of the building that fronted the regular road, and it was evident from the way in which they kept their eyes in that direction that they anticipated the approach of the invading enemy there.

Two or three paces from them, with his eyes also at a loophole, stood the officer in command of the squad.

His drawn sword was in one hand, and in the other was a revolver.

It was evident from a glance at the situation that Hal had done well to approach the place by any but the regular road. The retreating Spaniards had left this little detachment to watch the way by which the American invaders were expected to advance upon Santiago's defences.

It was perfectly natural that the Spanish commander should have supposed that General Shafter would send a reconnoitering party up the road.

These soldiers were here, then, to give the warning of the approach of such a party, and possibly to delay the advance of the reconnoisance for a short time.

It could not mean that they hoped to make a serious resistance, for their numbers were too few.

There must be something further then in the presence of these men here, and in their attitude of watchfulness.

These thoughts flashed through Hal's

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mind in the instant that he stood in the doorway, while at the same time his quick eyes took in another feature of the situation.

Over on the side of the room nearest which he stood, and farthest therefore from the soldiers, was an open trap door.

Hal could just see the top of the steps that led down to the cellar. He could see, too, that a loose plank had been laid along these steps, as if it had been intended to use it like skids for pushing boxes or other heavy articles to the place below.

The same glance that revealed the plank stretching down into the darkness of the cellar showed that it was not placed there for any such simple purpose.

An irregular black line lay along the surface of the plank, joining to a black line upon the floor of the block house that extended to the very doorway where the American soldier stood.

It was all horribly clear.

The black line was a train of powder, leading down, undoubtedly, to a magazine below the floor.

The desperate purpose of this little detachment, or at least the purpose of its officer, was apparent.

The roadway was to be watched for a sign of an American advance.

If the reconnoitreing party consisted of merely a handful, perhaps this little squad would endeavor to resist and drive them back.

If the numbers of the Americans should prove to be overwhelming, it was undoubtedly the plan of the officer to fire one volley, with the purpose of inducing the Americans to charge the house, and then when the invaders had come near, to fire the train.

The explosion of a large magazine would not only blow the house to atoms,

but probably destroy hundreds of the enemy as the same time.

And the Spanish soldiers?

It mattered little to them, for they were desperately beset, and the action of the officer in killing one of his own men, showed that he at least was willing to be blown to death with the Americans, if by doing so, he could destroy a large number of his country's foes.

One of the soldiers in the line stirred restlessly.

"Silence!" exclaimed the officer, under his breath. "Keep to your posts, every man of you. The next one that stirs, or breathes aloud, dies like the dog who disobeyed me a few minutes ago."

So saying, the officer raised his revolver, and half pointed it toward his men.

There was the most determined expression on his face that Hal had ever seen. He was an enemy that one would not care to meet in any kind of combat.

The observation of all these details had taken less than a second, and just as the officer spoke, Hal's two companions came up and stood beside him.

One of them stepped upon stick, which cracked under his it said

There was a tremor ikee pigs cap-n's shoulder on the line at the result use it.

The officer started to jump to his feed and turn around.

On the instant, Hal seized the revolver that he had given to Vara, and raising it, fired without apparently taking aim.

The bullet went straight to the intended mark, not the officer's heart, but his pistol hand.

The weapon dropped harmlessly to the floor, even as the officer arose, cursing with pain, and staring at his bleeding fingers.

"Surrender, every man of you," shouted Hal. "You are surrounded!"

"About face, and shoot them down,"

howled the officer, making toward Hal with his sword raised.

"Shoot them, men, if they don't drop their weapons," cried Hal, as he passed the revolver back to Vara.

One of the men in the line at the wall wheeled about at the command, with his rifle at his shoulder.

Smithson fired as quickly as Hal had done, and the soldier dropped lifeless to the floor.

The other soldiers, who had also turned about, some with raised weapons, now threw their rifles down, and held up their hands in token of surrender.

It was all taking place so quickly, that by this time the Spanish officer was only half way across the room.

"Oh, you cowardly dogs," he cried, halting where he was, "you hope to save your miserable lives by surrender, do you? This then will blow you and the Yankee pigs to eternity together."

Fairly shricking these words, he allowed his sword to drop to the floor, for now he had only one hand he could use, and reaching for his pocket, he took out a match, which he lit and stooped to apply it to What wher train.

Ahat block if a second and the train we The question with it would come the intended explosion.

Hal was already leaping through the entrance to grapple with the officer, when Vara fired.

The Spanish officer fell on his face, without so much as a groan, his outstretched hand, holding the burning match, lying within two inches of the powder train.

CHAPTER IV.

DISPOSING OF PRISONERS.

Smithson, who was pushing into the room close behind Hal, put his foot upon the burning match.

The Spanish soldiers, not only stupefied by surprise and the death of their commander and a comrade, were almost paralyzed with fear.

Every one of them fell upon his knees and raising his hands in a most pitiful way, begged for mercy.

"Spare us, Americanos, spare us!" they whined.

As Hal had not the faintest idea of injuring the soldiers so long as they did not offer resistance, and as he had still less idea what in the world he should do with them, he found it hard to refrain from laughing at this appeal.

With a sly wink he turned to Smithson and remarked:

"Now that we have got them surrounded and taken, I don't know what to do about it."

"Of course they are in the way," muttered Smithson, by way of reply, "and as soon as they see how few they are of us, it's likely they'll run. Why not let them go?"

Hal shook his head.

"Now that I have got them," he said, "my pride is against letting them get away, to say nothing of the fact that I don't care to have them go back to the enemy and warn them that a scout is on the way, almost single handed."

"We are not going to hurt you," said Hal, addressing the soliers in Spanish. "If you obey my instructions you will not only be safe, but well fed, too, and that's a good deal better, I take it, than you've been for many a month."

"We only ask our miserable lives," said one of the soldiers.

Hal uttered an exclamation of disgust, for he could not endure the abject cowardice displayed by these Spaniards.

There was no time to think of it then, but later he realized that there was some excuse for the Spanish soldiers. They

WAR BUTTONS AND BADGES FREE-SEE PAGE 32.

were subjected by their own officers to the severest form of discipline. They were underfed, treated worse than dogs, and on top of that they were led to believe that the Americans were little short of devils. It was a part of the army teaching that the Spanish officers were angels compared with the Americans.

Moreover, these particular soldiers were well aware of the frightful plans that their leader had formed of destroying the first detachment of Americans that should

approach the block house.

Hal still stood over the dead officer, as puzzled as before as to how he should dispose of his prisoners. But a second or two, however, had elapsed since the capture of the place.

Vara had darted to the door and Smithson had followed him. Both were listening intently.

"What is it?" asked Hal.

Vara's keen Cuban ears had distinguished sounds that had escaped him.

Smithson raised his hand in a warning gesture and beckoned Hal to the door-

"Keep your eyes on the prisoners," commanded Hal, as he stepped to Vara's side.

Out in the brush to the northward he heard sounds of movement. More than one person was making toward the block house.

No Americans could be coming from that direction.

Had the Spaniards sent a company on to reinforce the little detachment left in charge of the house?"

If so, capture and death would be certain, for the three young men could not hope to resist in an open fight with a considerable body of soldiers.

The sounds indiated that it was a rather large number of men who were making through the forest.

Hal grasped his word more tightly and muttered.

"If it comes to the worst, we will fight to the death, even if we have to fire the train and destroy the Spaniards as they hoped to destroy us."

An instant later he saw the muzzle of a rifle poked out from a thicket at the beginning of the forest a few rods back of the block house.

"Call to them, senor," whispered "It is not Spaniards."

Hal already believed that this was the

"Viva Cuba Libre," he shouted at the top of his voice.

"Cuba Lihre," came in a mighty chorus of voices from the thicket.

The next instant where the muzzle of the rifle had appeared there was a head under a ragged hat, and a second later beside that head was another, and these were followed by others until within the little clearing between the blockhouse and the forest, two score of Cuban soldiers came swarming forward.

Most of them were armed with rifles, and all with machetes. There was a look of wonderment in their faces, for they recognized the uniform that Hal wore, and knew that the blockhouse was occupied by Uncle Sam's soldiers-that is, they supposed it was.

It was not until they had come shouting up to the very entrance that they realized that but one soldier of Uncle Sam's was there, and then when they looked in and saw the crouching prisoners they turned their eyes first in new wonderment to Hal's two companions, while some of them raised their guns threateningly upon the prisoners.

"No, no," cried Hal, using his sword to strike up the rifle nearest to him. "Those men are not to be harmed. They have surrendered."

EVERYONE, EXCEPT CRIMINALS, LIKE NICK CARTER.

"But where is the rest of your command, colonel?" asked the officer who was in charge of the Cubans.

Hal could not repress a smile at the title given him, but he answered seriously.

"This is my entire command that you see here, sir."

"These young men?" asked the Cuban officer, in renewed astonishment.

"These," returned Hal. "Permit me to present Lieutenant Smithson, U. S. Army, and this is Antonio Vara, insurgent sympathizer, who will doubtless be glad to take the first opportunity to join the Cuban army."

The Cuban officer, who looked little different from the men he commanded, was a good deal taken aback by Hal's formality. He saluted Simthson with grave respect, and then, evidently feeling that he was called upon to show a military bearing, he drew himself up to his full height of about five feet, squared his shoulders, and said:

"I am Major Sanchez, by commission of General Garcia, at your service, colonel. I was ordered by my general to bring my battalion to the coast. Knowing that there was a block house here we made up our minds to capture it on our way, but it seems that you have got ahead of us, colonel."

"Yes, but pardon me, I am not a colonel," responded Hal. "I am Lieutenant Maynard, at your service, major, and shall be highly honored if you will relieve me of my prisoners on your way to the coast."

"I shall be proud to escort them, sir."

"And will you be kind enough to take
a note to my general?"

Kind enough! The thought of bearing a message to the commander of the American army was enough to give the little major pride for all the rest of his days. He was a soldier, and a fighter, but like some other men he had his vanity, and it gave him a tremendous sense of importance to be charged with the delivery of these prisoners and a report from the American lieutenant.

It was a fortunate way out of Hal's difficulty. After cautioning the major that the prisoners must be delivered unharmed to the American commander, he wrote a brief note explaining the situation and announcing that a large quantity of ammunition was stored beneath the block house.

This he knew to be the case, because Smithson made an investigation below the floor while he was writing.

The powder train had been laid to connect with a great many kegs that lay on the ground below stairs.

When the note was written and the battalion of Cubans was ready to march on, Hal noticed that they were acompanied by a number of pacificos.

Most of these were men, and all were dressed in anything but a military costume.

An idea occurred to the American, which he was not slow to act upon.

It caused a little delay, but when Hal and his comrades set forth again, the American uniform had disappeared and the three looked like unfortunate Cuban peasants, except for the fact that their frames were not worn away by hunger.

CALL YOUR FRIENDS ATTENTION TO OUR PREMIUMS-SEE PAGE 32.

On the shore near Baiquiri Hal could just make out the fluttering Stars and Stripes.

All these were cheering sights and sounds for the young soldier, but he gave them scant attention.

His eyes were more occupied in observing the signs of the enemy that lay on the lower ridges between him and the sea.

From his watching place he could discern very clearly many of the lines of earthworks that the Spaniards had thrown up to check the American advance, and where the earthworks were not visible, it was still possible to distinguish the block houses and the crude forts that indicated plainly enough the general lines of the enemy's defense.

This was a large and very important part of the information that General Shafter had sent him to obtain.

The lay of the land was firmly fixed in his memory, and he felt that even if he should be forced to return with nothing more gained than this, he would still be able to give the commander valuable points in regard to the coming conflict.

It need hardy be said, however, that Hal was far from satisfied to return with this kind of information only.

He had spent but a fraction of the time allowed for his expedition, and the rest of it must be put in in learning as much as possible concerning the number of men behind those miles of intrenchments and the quality of the arms with which they were defended.

Accordingly after he had remained as e Best Detective Stories Written.

Second Part.

to the consum der al file

CHAPTER V.

PRISONERS OF ANOTHER KIND.

It was now about the middle of the afternoon, and for the next four hours the scouters were occupied in making their way circuitously through the forest.

It was impossible to proceed a single rod by any regular road or pass, because all such ways were held by the Spanish in larger and larger force the nearer they drew to Santiago.

Even Vara, with all his familarity with the district, was often puzzled for a time as to how they should proceed to avoid being observed by Spanish pickets.

One after another, however, they passed the block houses that guarded the lines and at length, just before sundown, came to the top of a high hill where, by climbing a tree, Hal was able to overlook several miles of territory between the spot and the sea.

In the distance was the blue of ocean thickly dotted with the American transports.

Off to the westward he could hear the dull booming of the warship's guns.

They were still bombarding the larger fortifications along the coast near the entrance to the Bay of Santiago.

The Nick Carter Weekly Contains The Best Detective Stories Written.

long as he cared to in the tree, he descended and sketched a rough map of the country which he took the precaution to place in his shoe.

Then he told Vara what point he wished to make next.

It was a place well within the enemy's lines, and in the neighborhood of Jaragua.

At this town, so far as he could see, the heaviest of the enemy's forces had been massed.

Vara thought a moment, and then declared that he could lead the way there, still by a roundabout way, with little or no danger of being intercepted by Spanish pickets.

So they set out on a new course.

Darkness fell quickly, for evening is short in the tropics, and before they had gone more than two or three miles it was impossible for them to see each other.

They were still in the forest and while it had been difficult enough to make progress during daylight, it was now almost impossible on account of the tangle of briars that beset their feet.

The hands and faces of all three were bleeding from tiny but annoying wounds.

After a time Hal stopped short.

"This won't do," he said, decidedly.

"I am sure that this course will bring us out all right," said Vara, confidently.

"I have no doubt of it," responded Hal, "but it isn't alone the question of getting to Jaragua that trobles me, as the matter of getting there in such shape that we won't be instantly suspected."

"Our clothing isn't going to look any better an hour from now than it does at this time," suggested Smithson. "The disguise, so far as clothing goes, is all right," said Hal, "and our rags might be torn twenty times as badly without endangering us. But my hands are badly scratched and my face feels as if it had been mutilated beyond recognition."

"It will be good enough," declared Smithson, "to go within the enemy's lines without being recognized, won't it?"

"You miss the point, my friend. If we go into the enemy's camp with faces and hands bleeding from briar wounds, we shall certainly arouse suspicion. The Spaniards will naturally enough want to know what we were prowling around in the forest for at night."

"And we shan't be able to give them a satisfactory answer," said Vara.

"Then what are we going to do?" asked Smithson.

Hal's reply was another qestion.

"How far are we now from Jaragua?"

"Not more than three miles in a direct line," answered Vara, "and perhaps twice as far by the route we shall have to take. When we arrive there we shall come in from the direction of Santiago."

"That is good, and we will enter Jaragua after daybreak."

"And between now and then?" inquired Smithson.

"We will bivouac in the best place that Vara can find near by. It will give our scratches time to heal and besides that I shall have a better opportunity of getting the information I want when it is daylight.

Neither of Hal's companions were dis-

Spain in the Eagle's Claws is Our "Now Will You Be Good" Button-See Page 32.

posed to argue the matter with him, and he spoke in such a decided tone that even if they had felt that his plan was unwise, they would not have said so.

Accordingly, they moved a little way from where they had halted and found a comparatively bare spot where they threw themselves down to sleep.

Hal, of course, did not venture to take this rest unguarded, and he arranged the night into watches, one man keeping guard for two hours at a stretch while the others slept.

In this way the night passed uneventfully, and at break of day the three continued their journey.

Avoiding the cactus and briars as much as possible, they still made rapid progress and at length came upon a cart track which Vara assured them would bring them upon the western side of Jaragua about half a mile further on.

His knowledge of the country proved to be perfect, for true to his prophecy they presently saw a number of poor huts in front of them as they rounded a turn in the road.

These huts were upon the outskirts of Jaragua farthest from the fortifications, which, of course, were upon the side fronting the American advance.

A number of poverty stricken, hopeless-looking people were observed in the vicinity of the huts.

"They are refugees," said Vara, under his breath, while his dark cheeks flushed with indignation.

"I suppose," said Smithson, "that they are inhabitants of Jaragua who have been driven from their homes in the

town proper to find such shelter as they can out here.

"In any case," added Vara, "they are here to starve."

"Not all of them," said Hal, pointing to a hut that stood at a distance apart from the rest.

Following his gesture, they saw three persons, a man, a woman and a girl, bending over a fire near the hut.

It was evident that they were cooking something.

"I am glad some of the poor people have got food," said Vara.

"So am I," responded Hal, "and I think it will be safer for us if we make a pretense of being hungry ourselves. We will go over there and play beggars."

Both Hal and Smithson had taken with them a small quantity of hard tack, and most of this, by sharing it with Vara, had been eaten when they took up their march in the morning.

All three would have been glad to sit down to a square meal at that moment, although with the grit of true soldiers they would have been willing to pass the entire day without food if anything could be accomplished by so doing.

"There is only one trouble with that scheme," Smithson said.

"What is it?"

"Those poor people will be likely to diminish their stock of provisions to help us, and we certainly don't want to take any of their food."

"We will decline to do so on some pretext, if they offer us any," replied Hal, "but I think it important to play the part of beggars."

"THE UNSEEN EYE" HAS A GIRL DETECTIVE.

With this plan in view, they started across the field toward the hut.

The persons cooking at the fire did not observe their approach, for their attention was attracted by several soldiers who came quickly up from an opposite direction.

They were Spanish soldiers, of course, but that fact did not make Hal and his companions pause.

It would not do to arouse the enemy's suspicions by appearing to fear the Spaniards.

The scouters were more than half way across the field when the soldiers came up to the people by the fire.

Hal and his companions could hear the harsh voices of the soldiers demanding food and the plaintive replies of the refugees declaring that they had only enough for themselves and that they had hardly eaten anything for days.

"Why don't you die then, dogs?" retorted one of the soldiers roughly, as he bent over and seized something that lay on the ground near the fire.

It was evidently food of some kind.

"Do not take it," the woman pleaded,

With an oath, the soldier not only tore the article from her hands, but struck her so violent a blow in the face with his fist that she fell moaning to the ground.

The man made a movement as if he would interfere to protect his wife, whereupon two other soldiers fell upon him and began to beat him unmercifully.

"Merciful Heaven!" exclaimed Vara, between set teeth, "but I can't stand that."

With these words he dashed away from Hal and Smithson, and charged full tilt upon the soldiers.

As he had but a few paces to go he was upon them before either the man or the woman had had time to rise.

Crack, slap, went Vara's fists, each landing upon a soldier's head and felling him to the ground.

"Here's a fine pickle," said Hal in great anxiety, while his indignation, too, rose overpoweringly at sight of the Spaniard's barbarity.

He began to run.

"What are you going to do?" asked Smithson.

"Going to pitch in with Vara," responded Hal. "It's too late for discretion, anyway, for we should be identified as Vara's companions."

There was no time for any further discussion of the matter, for the two were even then upon the soldiers, who had turned furiously at the unexpected attack.

For a moment there was a sharp conflict with fists.

The soldiers had not brought their weapons with them, and of course neither Hal nor his companions ventured to use their revolvers.

Although the Spaniards outnumbered the American and his friends, they were no match for them when it came to a battle with fists.

Hal threw himself upon the two largest men, striking out at both of them.

One blow landed effectively, but the other fell short and the man aimed at grappled with Hal and tried to throw him to the ground.

FREE WAR BADGES. SEE LAST PAGE.

He found speedily that he was not tackling a half-starved Cuban. Hal pressed his forearm against the soldier's throat and gave him a sharp, short arm blow between the eyes.

The soldier staggered away and fell much as if he had been felled by a bullet.

Meantime Smithson and Vara were hitting out right and left and were doing good service.

How long the fight might have continued cannot be said, for although the soldiers were clearly outmatched in skill and real strength, they had no idea that they were fighting any but pacificos and therefore might have continued much longer, although Hal from motives of prudence might have thought it best to stop the fighting at an early moment.

The matter ended, however, when an officer accompanied by four armed soldiers hurried up.

At sight of them the soldiers who had attempted to rob the refugees of their food, stopped fighting and began in loud voices to accuse their assailants.

"You have no business here," said the officer, sternly addressing the soldiers. "Report back to your quarters. As for yeu," turning to Hal and his companions, you are prisoners."

CHAPTER VI.

The therease continue at

COVERING A RETREAT.

There was nothing for it but to surrender quietly. Resistance would have been sure to make matters worse for the scouters.

As it was, there could be no doubt that the officer was convinced that he had captured, not Americans, necessarily, but spies who had been sent out by the American commander.

He asked no questions, but Hal heard his conversation with another officer who presently joined him, and from that was clear that the three prisoners were likely to be so placed that escape would be impossible. Vara was terribly cast down by what had happened.

"It was all my fault," he said, in a low voice. "I ought to have known enough to control my indignation."

"I cannot see that you are to be blamed," said Hal, quietly.

"Ah, but," protested Vara, "if I had not assaulted the soldiers we should not have been arrested."

"I am not sure," Hal responded, "that I should have been able to prevent my-self from assaulting them. It was enough to make any white man's blood boil."

"True," muttered Smithson, "and three months ago I should not have thought of anything but going to the rescue of those poor people, but now I

FIVE CENTS WILL BUY THE NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

cannot help fearing the result of it upon your mission, my friend. You represent the American army at this moment, and with it the salvation of Cuba. I do not know what your mission is, but I can guess it, and whatever happens now, Hal, you must make your way back to the American lines."

"Yes," said Hal gravely, "you are quite right. The affair is unfortunate, but as you say, I must get back—not for my own sake, but for the sake of what I can carry to the general."

Vara heard them and realized as well as did Smithson the importance of doing everything now to help: Hal to escape.

"I only hope," he murmured disconsolately, "that something will turn up that will enable me to sacrifice myself for you and the cause."

Before long they were walking through the main part of Jaragua.

All was bustle and activity there.

Officers and soldiers were hurrying about in various directions, and on every side could be heard voices of command and the movements of men making ready to resist the expected American advance.

Hal kept his eyes open at every turn. Determined as he was to get back somehow to the American lines, he filled his mind with every detail possible concerning the preparations for defense.

The route taken by the officer gave him as good a view of the fortifications as he could have got if he had been going unheeded through the town.

At length he was halted before a building that was evidently the headquarters of the division. A number of officers stood before the door, some of them on horses, others standing beside horses ready to mount.

It looked as if all were awaiting a command to hurry away somewhere.

Just as Hal's escort halted there two other officers emerged from the building and hastened to horses which they prepared to mount.

Hal's captor saluted one of these and said:

"My general, these prisoners-"

"Eh?" said the general, with his foot in the stirrup, and with a glance at Hal and his companions.

"I captured them--"

"Who are they? Cuban pacificos?"

"They were resisting soldiers--"

"Why weren't they shot, then?"

"The soldiers, my general, were without arms, having gone without leave to the fields to steal food from reconcentrados, and——"

"Put them in the guardhouse, then," roared the general, throwing himself into the saddle.

The officer did not understand whether the general referred to the prisoners or to the disobedient soldiers.

Saluting again, he began:

"Shall I put these prisoners--"

"I haven't time to bother with them," cried the general. "Did they come from the direction of Santiago?"

"I believe they did."

"Then send them back. We can't stop to bother with them."

With this, the general gave the word of command and all the officers assembled

OLD GLORY BADGES AS PREMIUMS—SEE PAGE 32,

near the house mounted and rode away ity, although up the road toward Santiago with him.

Hal and Smithson exchanged glances of relief.

Turning to them, their captor said:

"Go back whence you came, dogs, and if you are found anywhere within this camp you will be shot at sight. You are lucky to get off so well."

Hal thought the officer was quite right, but he didn't venture to say so.

Wheeling about at once, he started back along the road down which they had come.

"You are not really going to go to Santiago, of course," whispered Vara.

"No," replied Hal. "I shall take the first opportunity to get through the lines and start for the American position. Any suggestion that you can make, Vara, as to a short way--"

"If we go just outside the town," interrupted Vara, "and then turn to the eastward a little way beyond the block house you can see there, we shall come to a stream thickly wooded on each side, down which we may be able to wade, and thus escape observation by the pickets."

"We will try it," said Hal, resolutely. "All Spanish eyes this morning will be turned in the direction of the American forces, and they will be looking so far away that they may not see what goes on right under their noses."

In accordance with this plan, Hal and his companions turned from the road at about the point where they had had their fight with the thieving soldiers.

At that moment, there were none but the helpless reconcentrados in this vicina cloud of dust showed the approach of a considerable Spanish force.

"I should like to know how many men there are in that detachment," said Hal

After they had gone a little way from the road, he halted and climbed a tree in the edge of the forest where he stayed long enough to make out that the approaching detachment numbered about five hundred men.

Then he and his companions went on. Still guided by Va:a, they succeeded in making their way around the block house that marked the northern end of the fortifications at Jaragua without observation.

When they came to the stream of which Vara had spoken, it was at a place were there was a waterfall. I toould not be crossed at that point without extreme danger of being carried right over the edge to certain death upon the rocks below. So Hal lead his companions down to the bottom of the falls and a little way beyond determined to take the chance of fording.

The current was very swift and the water apparently deep, but the stream was not wide, and all three believed that they should be able to cross in safety.

Hal plunged in at once.

The current almost threw him over, but he struggled on and presently turned in mid-stream to advise his companions about avoiding a slippery rock just underneath the surface.

He saw that they were on the point of following him, when, a little way back of them there was the sound of a rifle shot.

A bullet splashed in the water beside Hal.

"We are discovered," cried Vara. "Do not wait for us. We will fight the pickets as well as we can to cover your retreat."

It was the one thing to do.

Hal regretted that he could not go back and help his friends who had been so loyal to him, but there was his mission for the commanding general.

He believed the information he had obtained was too valuable to be sacrificed on any account, and accordingly he again plunged into the current and made as rapidly as possible for the further shore.

Another rifle shot and another bullet splashing into the water uncomfortably close.

It looks as if they had got my range," thought Hal, "and although they are not good marksmen, some shot may accidentally hit me."

To avoid this he dove beneath the surface, eyes open, and at momentary risk of being dashed to death upon the rocks at the bottom, allowed the current to take him down the stream several rods. At length, believing that he had gone beyond the point where the pickets were firing, he rose to thet surface and after slipping and tumbling for a moment or two, he gained the bank.

Halting a moment there and looking back, he caught just a glimpse of Smithson pegging away with his revolver at unseen foes, and at foes, moreover, whose exact presence could not be located because they used smokeless powder. On the ground at Smithson's feet lay the motionless body of Vara.

With a great sinking of the heart at this sight, but ever mindful of his important mission, Hal plunged into the forest and made toward the American line.

He used all speed possible, although that did not mean that he went fast on account of the obstacles in the way of briars and tangled underbrush.

More than once he would have missed his course if it had not been that the day was bright and through the foliage he could make out the position of the sun. Guided by this, he proceeded with desperate haste ever eastward until he suddenly emerged upon a beaten path that seemed to wind along in the same direction, generally speaking, which he wished to take.

He set off down this path on the run, believing that he had now one so far that he was beyond the outermost lines of the Spaniards.

He had hardly taken three paces, when he was aware that he was being pursued.

Fearful that his mission would be fruitless just as it seemed to be on the point of succeeding, he ran the faster but still without being able to entirely lose the sound of pursuing steps.

Looking over his shoulder he could not see the pursuer because the path was continually winding and the foliage always intervened.

Once when he looked around thus, he lost his footing, or tripped upon something, and fell full length.

GIVE YOUR GIRL AN AMERICAN FLAG HAT PIN-SEE PAGE 32.

"The Spaniard is as good a runner as I am," he said to himself, desperately, "and I might as well fight him now while I have a little breath as to try to run further." He drew his revolver and faced about with one knee on the ground, ready to fire the instant his pursuer should appear.

The sound of hurrying steps continued and grew louder and of a sudden around the bend of the path came Smithson.

"Ah, old chap," cried Smithson excitedly; "you ran so fast I thought I never should catch you."

"Why in thunder didn't you yell?" demanded Hal, as he lowered his weapon; "then I should have known who it was. As it is, I came pretty near shooting you."

"I hadn't breath enough to yell," returned Smithson, "and besides, I wasn't sure it was you."

"Well, I never expected to see you alive again."

"The Spanish pickets must have thought there were a hundred of us," said Smithson; "I blazed away till every shot in the revolver was gone without once seeing the enemy, and then I leaped into the stream and crossed as you did."

"And Vara?"

"Captured." Austra parameters in the summer

"Wasn't he killed?"

"No. Seriously wounded, though, I think."

"Too bad we couldn't have brought him back with us."

Even while they were talking they had resumed their way, and within half an hour they came to the American outposts.

There, as Hal did not have the countersign, they were obliged to surrender themselves as prisoners, but this lead to no annoyance, for they were conducted speedily to headquarters where Hal made his report.

He was highly complimented on the success of his undertaking, and was informed that General Shafter did not mean to keep him idle.

The forward movement of the army had begun, and Hal found himself assigned to command a detachment of skirmishers upon the extreme right.

His command was already on the way when he received his orders, and he promptly mounted a horse and set out to join them.

Third Part.

CHAPTER VII.

THE QUEEN OF THE RED CROSS.

The young lieutenant caught up with his detachment at a point not far from the place where he had escaped capture and where Vara had been made prisoner.

That place was in the forest, and the detachment under temporary command of a second lieutenant was making for an open valley a little way to the eastward.

On the further side of the valley, that is, in the direction of Santiago, the ground sloped upward.

The summit of the ridge was lined with trees, thus presenting a fine opportunity for the enemy to mask their forces

From his previous observation, Hal

NICK CARTER'S BOYS ARE DEVOTED TO HIM.

knew that that innocent looking ridge concealed a long trench behind which, if they had followed their plans, lay a considerable body of Spanish infantry, protected by a complete battery of artillery.

Lieutenant Maynard promptly ordered his men to deploy in skirmish order, and lie flat on the ground.

The American forces under his command were at that time just within the shelter of the forest near the beginning of the open valley.

Regular soldiers as they were, and accustomed by their experience in Indian fighting to this kind of battle, they obeyed promptly, taking their stations at intervals of about three yards.

Hal tethered his horse among the trees and joined his men at about the centre of the line.

He then gave the command to move forward, this action to be accomplished without rising. The men were further instructed not to fire without command unless the enemy should open on them. Under such circumstances, the American soldiers were to fire at will.

Hardly had the line begun to wriggle forward through the grass when there was a roar of cannon and the rattle of musketry from the woods at the top of the ridge.

The enemy had discovered the advancing skirmish line.

The air fairly hissed with bullets that flew over the heads of the soldiers and clipped the foliage in the woods behind, while above the hissing of the bullets was the angry shrieking of shells, varied presently by the sharp report of shrapnel as the shells burst in air and hurled their destructive contents right and left upon the grass where the soldiers lay.

It was an awful moment.

Hal had faced death in battle too many times to feel any personal fear, but he was conscious of the appalling danger to which his troops were subjected.

The force at the top of the ridge far outnumbered his, to say nothing of the fact that they were amply protected by artillery.

It was evident, too, that the artillerists had carefully studied this valley and calculated the range of every yard of it.

Furthermore, it was maddening to observe that while the whole region roared with the Spanish fire, nothing but sound indicated the locality of the enemy.

The Spanish were using smokeless powder, and it was only by the most careful watching that the Americans could occasionally catch the flash of their rifles and artillery among the foliage at the top of the ridge.

The skirmishers in the grass returned a volley, aiming as well as they could at the ridge summit, but without a man in sight or the smoke of a single gun to suggest a target.

On the other hand, the smoke from the American arms instantly revealed their position to the enemy.

"Steady, boys," called Hal. "Don't fire until we know a little more about the position of the enemy."

Then, exposing himself to the entire detachment of the Spanish, he ran from one end of his skirmish line to the other, informing his men as to the character of

READ THE LIBERAL OFFER ON PAGE 32.

STARRY FLAG WEEKLY.

the intrenchment on the ridge, basing his commands upon what he had discovered during his scouting expedition.

It was little enough, considering that his forces were so few and so exposed to the enemy's fire, but it was sufficient to enable the soldiers to direct their aim with more certainty. This done, Hal returned to his place at the middle of the line.

His expedition, of course, had called out a still more galling fire, but apparently it was directed on general principles, according to ranges previously established, than aimed especially at him.

The bullets shrieked and hissed as before, and the shrapnel burst over the line, but none of the missiles struck the daring lieutenant.

One of the American soldiers was hit by the fragment of a shell at the first fire.

Hal had seen him while he was going to the end of the line, and when he returned he found that an extraordinary thing had happened.

A Red Cross nurse was kneeling beside the wounded man trying to attend to his injuries.

Where she had come from was, for the moment, a mystery.

It proved later that this incident was one of a number that showed a hitch somewhere in the Amercan preparations for battle.

It is now well known that the army advanced upon Santiago without having made adequate preparation for the care of the wounded.

For a time, even the services of the Red Cross nurses were declined.

In spite of this, however, the nurses had gone to the field and applied themselves to the work wherever they found anything to do.

There was plenty of it, as the bloody encounters before Santiago have testified, but during the first day or two the work was unsystematic. It seems that this nurse had been directed by her superior to go toward the American right, for it was supposed that fighting would take place there.

Owing to the lack of system referred to, she had made her way as best she could, and had no idea that she was near the firing line until the Spanish volley was fired almost in her face upon the American skirmishers.

The nurse's name was Mary Sheldon.

She had become known to many of the men in camp, where her uniform kindness and skill had led the soldier boys to nickname her "The Queen of the Red Cross."

True to her noble calling, Miss Sheldon ran promptly to the wounded man, and there Hal found her.

"You ought not to be here, Miss Sheldon," he exclaimed, quickly. "You had better retire to the woods. I will send the wounded there as fast as possible."

She rose to reply to him.

"It seems to me," she said, "that my place is where suffering is."

Then it seemed as if the enemy had found a new target.

The nurse's dress was evidently more conspicuous than the lieutenant's uniform.

The roar of firing on the ridge top

NICK CARTER'S DISGUISES ARE WONDERFUL.

rolled up in a greater volume of sound, and the whistling of bullets became fiercer.

They cut the grass all around the spot where Hal and the nurse stood; they shrieked over their heads, and Miss Sheldon even uttered a little gasp of dismay, as she observed that her skirt was torn in many places.

"In Heaven's name," shouted Hal, "are the fiends firing upon the wounded and nurses as well as soldiers?"

This seemed, indeed, to be the fact.

Horrible as it was, the experience of our army before Santiago showed again and again that the blood-thirsty Spaniards had no consideration for the ordinary rules of civilized warfare.

For one instant Miss Sheldon crouched before the withering fire.

Then she stood erect and faced it boldly.

"They cannot have recognized my purpose here," she said; "if they see me clearly——"

She would have concluded by declaring that the Spaniards would not fire at her, but the increasing storm of bullets showed that she was mistaken.

Hal turned to the nearest of his soldiers and summoned them to the spot.

They obeyed him instantly.

"Escort this American woman to safety," roared Hal above the shriek of shell and the din of battle. "Every man here will die to cover your retreat."

Even as he spoke, a fragment of a bursting shell struck one of the four men whom Hal had detailed as escort to the nurse. It was clear even to brave Miss Sheldon that her presence on the fighting line was a mistake. Not only her own life was in danger, but her conspicuous dress called forth a hotter fire than otherwise would have been poured by the enemy.

She was endangering not only herself but the American soldiers.

She, therefore, turned toward the forest from which the skirmishers had come, and her escort accompanied her, firing back as they went at the unseen foe.

A fierce shout arose from the Americans on the skirmish line as they observed this episode.

Their mad was up.

They were not only determined to overcome the Spaniards, but every one of them would have been glad to rise from his place for the sake of forming a solid line around the popular nurse.

It was but a moment before the escort had accompanied Miss Sheldon to the line of trees where she was comparatively safe.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BRILLIANT DASH.

As soon as the nurse had been removed to a place of safety, Hal gave his whole attention to the conflict.

For a moment he was in doubt as to what course he should pursue, for he knew that nobody would expect him to attempt to carry the ridge by assault.

His men were too few for that. and

YOU SHOULD HAVE A "DEWEY" MEDAL.

General Shafter himself knew perfectly well that it was a large force that the enemy had massed at that point.

On the other hand, by keeping his men as they were Hal was exposing them to a fire that seemed to be unnecessary.

What good purpose was to be served by letting the men lie in the grass there to be slowly picked off as they would by the Spaniards who, in default of good marksmanship were pouring a perfect avalanche of shot among them?

The instant this question occurred came the answer to it.

It was the part of the subordinate officer to obey orders.

Possibly the sacrifice of this entire skirmish line was necessary to the carrying out of an elaborate plan of battle.

Accordingly, Hal sung out to his men to remain where they were, firing when they got a chance, and he himself lay down in the grass with them, for there was no longer any necessity of exposing himself.

His uniform seemed to be riddled with bullets, and for the first time he became aware of blood spots on his hands made by shots that had grazed him.

"Fortune is kind to me," he thought, "for I have escaped thus far without serious wounds. It must be that something else is in reserve for me during this war."

Something else was in reserve that very hour.

Hal had not lain in the grass a half minute before he became aware that the Americans were executing a flank movement upon the Spaniards entrenched along the ridge. From the east—that is, toward the centre of the American line—there suddenly came a column of charging infantry, making straight up one end of the ridge from which the Spaniards were still firing.

In the thin forest behind him he heard distinctly the approach of another detachment which undoubtedly would sweep across the valley and up the slope.

He turned his head a little to the right, almost expecting to see signs of another advance of the Americans in that direction.

He knew well enough that this could not happen, but the onward charges of the other two divisions were so well timed, and they promised to be so effective, that he instinctively looked to the right as if the Americans could drop an army from that quarter without the trouble of moving them across the lines from their camp.

His men saw the signs of the coming charge as quickly as he did, and they burst into cheers.

Hal saw then clearly enough what had been the military purpose of this skirmish line.

It had drawn the fire of the enemy, and shown the commanders of the advancing divisions just where to attack.

He rose to his feet, and his lips parted to give the command to charge, for he was highly excited and anxious to be in the thick of a grand advance and help sweep the Spaniards from their strong position.

Before he could say a word, an orderly

NICK CARTER IS THE KING OF THEM ALL.

rushed from the forest behind him, bearing an order from the commander.

"Withdraw the skirmishers, Lieutenant Maynard," was the order.

Never was command more unwillingly received. It seemed absolutely unkind on the part of the general to take these men out of the fight just as they had a chance to do something effective in it.

"Deploy to the right," added the orderly, "and await orders."

Disappointing though it was to obey, Hal made haste to execute the order.

His men, doubtless as much disappointed as he was, obeyed with equal promptness, hastening from their places toward the extreme right of the line, and thus giving room for the onward charge of the main divison.

At the edge of the forest the voices of officers could be heard, giving the command to charge.

Hal's blood thrilled at the sound and the sight, in spite of the fact that his heart was a little heavy at the thought that he was not to be in the charge.

Meantime, the Spaniards had kept up their uninterrupted fire until this very moment.

Then there came a slight pause in the roar of musketry at the top of the ridge.

Both divisions of the Americans were charging, one straight across the valley, and the other up the ridge at the eastern end in such a way as to come in behind the enemy.

After a slight pause in the Spanish fire there was another rattle of musketry on the ridge, but it was comparatively feeble and scattered.

"REMEMBER THE MAINE!"

The sound was unmistakable.

The enemy had taken panic at the flank movement and had broken into retreat.

They were not going to make more than a show of resistance to the advancing Americans.

By the time the Yankee soldiers got to the ridge, every Spaniard able to travel would be gone.

There would be no hand to hand conflict, and no chance of taking prisoners.

It was all glorious enough to see this triumphant sweep of the American arms, but Hal's soldierly blood rebelled a bit at having so little to show for a victory.

To be sure, the intrenchment would be taken, and that was so much gain in the advance on Sanitago, but——

A sudden thought occurred to him.

He knew the roads hereabout, for this was ground that he had traversed with Smithson and Vara on his scouting expedition.

From the top of that ridge there were three lines of fairly beaten road by which the Spaniards could retreat.

If they retreated in good order, they would likely take one of these roads which led in a fairly good line to Santiago itself.

If, as seemed more likely, they were fleeing in disorder, overcome with panic, they would scatter by the three roads, and some might even take to the woods.

It was altogether probable that some of the enemy would make a break down the road leading toward the block house near which Vara had been taken prisoner.

WEAR A "MAINE" BUTTON.

Why not take his men in that direction and intercept the fugitives?

He turned instantly to the men who had been in the skirmish line.

"Men," he cried, resolutely, "shall we turn their left flank?"

The sunburned faces of the veteran soldiers glowed with interest and many of them grinned broadly.

They caught the idea at once, for if their detachment could go around by the American extreme right and come upon the enemy, it would naturally seem to the Spaniards as if the Americans were executing a double flank movement, and that would be likely to intensify the panic.

To be sure the skirmishers were only a handful, but—

"It is yours to command, sir," said a gray bearded sergeant quietly.

"Follow me, then," shouted Hal, leaping away.

They followed with a will, but the young officer was more fleet of foot than they, and speedily far outstripped them.

Moreover, he knew just what course to take and he had had more experience than they in forcing a way through the tangle of undergrowth.

Unconscious of the fact that his soldiers were getting further and further behind him, Hal hastened on until he found himself upon one of the three roads that he knew about.

A little way ahead he saw twenty or more Spanish soldiers.

They had evidently been in retreat, and had just now been halted by an officer who was attempting to reform them. Hal heard the officer's excited commands. He was cursing the pigs of Yankees and his panic stricken soldiers in the same breath, calling upon them to stand and make a fight for it.

With no thought at all, but stirred only by the excitement of battle, Hal dashed on, flourishing his sword in one hand and his revolver in the other.

The first the Spaniards knew of his approach was the sound of his voice.

"Throw down your arms, every one of you! Throw them down or you'll be shot to pieces. There are two thousand men just behind me, and I shan't be able to hold them back if they see one of you with a weapon in his hands. Surrender if you hope for life."

That was what the Spaniards heard.

What they saw was a blood-stained American officer in a uniform that was ragged from the piercing of bullets, bare headed because his hat had been torn off by a briar, pushing upon them, his sword raised and revolver leveled, the determination of a whole army gleaming from his eyes.

The officer in command of the Spanish was the first to throw down his arms.

Nearly all his men did likewise.

Two or three made a break and tried to run for it.

A well-directed shot from Hal's revolver brought one of them down and that settled the rest of them.

They stood still.

A moment later one of Hal's skirmishers came rushing up and found his young commander holding a score of men at bay.

"Here, my man," cried Hal without moving his eyes from the Spaniards, "take aim at that crowd and drop the first man who moves."

The soldier placed himself beside Hal and obeyed orders.

In about a second another American arrived, and after him another.

Each new arrival received the same command until presently the entire force of skirmishers was on the spot.

Then it was a simple thing to advance upon the Spaniards, pick up their weapons and set them all marching toward the American line.

Hal ordered his men to make haste, because he wished them to return to the spot from which they had started, for the reason that he had been told to stay there and await orders.

He realized now for the first time that in making this brilliant dash he had really exceeded his instructions.

There was little fear of consequences, however, in view of the results, for he had not only captured an officer and nearly a score of men, but plainly had prevented the enemy from reforming their line.

They had gone but a few paces on their way back when Hal turned the command temporarily over to the second lieutenant.

"I shall be with you," he said, "almost as soon as you get there."

Without another word, he left the road and made straight through the forest.

He was going in the direction of the block house that he had been at such great pains to avoid earlier in the day. This block house was on the enemy's extreme left, and was not directly connected with the ridge which the Americans were storming.

Hal would have liked a commission to capture it, but having none, he ventured to leave his command for the sake of visiting it and accomplishing if possible another result.

In a few minutes he had arrived within sight of the house.

As he had more than half expected, the Spanish there had been affected by the panic of their comrades on the ridge.

Believing that the American forces were about to charge upon the house, they had begun to retreat from it, and before going they had applied the torch.

The wooden fort was already in flames, and sending up a great cloud of smoke.

The last of the Spaniards were just disappearing in the forest in the direction of Jaragua.

The moment Hal saw that the building was in flames, he began running toward it at full speed.

Two or three Spaniards caught sight of him and fired their rifles, but the shots went wild.

Without pausing, Hal banged back of them with his revolver, which caused the Spaniards to make all the more haste in disappearing.

Breathless he came to the entrance and rushed in.

He knew well enough that at any moment there would come a terrific explosion, for the fire, if left to itself, would reach whatever magazine there was there,

CUBA LIBRE-GET A CUBAN BUTTON.

and it might even be that the Spaniards had left a powder train to communicate with it.

Regardless of this possibility, he dashed in.

The smoke was too dense for him to see clearly.

Stooping, he began to feel his way around the sides of the building, hunting for something that he believed to be there.

"Vara," he cried, "are you here?"

A feeble voice responded to him from a far corner.

Quickly Hal was at the wounded man's side.

"The scoundrels left you to burn, did they?" exclaimed Hal, lifting the faithful Cuban in his arms.

"Yes," replied Vara, weakly, "or to be blown up. And you, my friend, you will be blown up, too, if you don't have a care. Leave me, Senor Lieutenant, I am not worth the risk."

"I shall not leave you," stubbornly responded Hal, "and if I hurt you in carrying you, remember it is your only chance for life."

The smoke was now so dense that he had hardly breath left to utter these words.

Staggering, not so much from the weight of Vara's body as from suffocation, he made his way to the door and so into the open air.

It was not until then that he realized how intense the heat was within the block house.

The perspiration was running in streams from every pore.

There was not a second to lose.

Even where they stood the din of battle filled their ears with a deafening clamor, and yet above it could be heard the crackling of the flames as they eagerly devoured the Spanish fort.

Any instant and the flames might reach the magazine.

Hal was struggling across the ground toward the forest, carrying Vara and unmindful of what the Cuban was trying to say.

About half the distance had been covered, when the explosion came.

The air in front of him seemed to give way while from behind there seemed to come a blow as from a giant hand.

Hal and his burden were thrown flat upon the ground.

For a second they lay there, halfstunned, and all about them burning debris began to fall.

The lieutenant was brought to consciousness by a red hot cinder falling on his hand.

He jumped up.

"Vara," he cried, "are you still abve?"

"Indeed I am," replied the Cuban.

Then Hal saw that Vara's hands and legs were bound.

"So," he exclaimed, drawing his sword, "they made certain that not even your wounds should prevent you from escaping."

"My wounds," replied Vara, while Hal was cutting the thongs that bound him, "are not so bad as those cords. I can walk or run now, if you like."

NICK CARTER, THE TERROR OF CRIMINALS.

"Good, then let's run."

Vara could not run fast, but he could make better progress than Hal could while carrying him, and so presently the two came to the detachment of skirmishers—at the point to which they had withdrawn when ordered out of the battle.

The lieutenant had lost nothing by his extra adventure, for it was not until after he resumed command of his detachment that any orders came to him from the commander.

Then he was instructed simply to take his men where they could rejoin their own regiment. The ridge had been captured, and for the rest of the day that division of the army saw no more fighting, and Hal's duty consisted merely in making his report to General Shafter. The general was too busily engaged in directing the advance of his army to say more than "Well done, lieutenant," but that was sufficient to Hal.

[THE END.]

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